

# The Sermon on the Mount

## “The Beatitudes”

Part 3

### “Blessed Are The Meek”

*Matthew 5:5*

#### **Engaging the Audience**

In September 1998, I accepted my first pastorate in the small rural town of Soperton, GA. I was 28 years old at the time and Cathy was seven months pregnant with our first child.

Soperton, GA is in the heart of Vidalia country – home of the sweet Vidalia onion. Soperton is a bustling metropolis of three thousand people. There were no McDonald’s, Chick-fil-A’s, Pizza Hut’s, Food Lion’s, Blockbuster’s, movie theaters, or BP stations. To enjoy any of these establishments, and any other modern amenities for that matter, one had to drive at least thirty miles to Dublin, GA – and sometimes one hour to Macon, GA.

To say that Soperton was small would be a huge understatement. In the entire town, there was only one flashing light.

Cathy and I moved to Soperton so that I could become the Sr. Pastor of First Baptist Church. My tenure was far shorter than I ever anticipated. Six months into my pastorate, the church’s longtime Associate Pastor admitted to being involved in immoral behavior.

Imagine being 29 years old, a first time father, an inexperienced pastor of a deeply established and traditional Southern Baptist Church, and being faced with a single Youth/Worship Pastor who was involved in immorality. Talk about jumping into the deep end.

After much wise counsel from mentors, friends, and my father, I presented the facts to the deacons. After much deliberation and prayer, the deacons unanimously agreed to seek the Associate Pastor’s resignation. We also agreed to keep the nature of the sin private, in hopes of protecting the man’s reputation within the community – a community he had served for over ten years. Our desire was to help him seek recovery and healing without exposing him to humiliation and scorn among those he had served for so many years.

As you can imagine, there were many questions, concerns, and a lot of speculation that came when the resignation was announced to the church. The heat was on, to say the least. People wanted details. People wanted answers. Why was the new young pastor running off the long-time Associate Pastor?

Two weeks later, the powder keg blew up in my face. Ten of the twelve deacons recanted of their decision. Losing someone who had served so faithfully for so many years was more than the church and most of her deacons and their wives could bear.

The problem had shifted from immorality to a young pastor who didn't know what he was doing. At that moment, it got nasty. Accusations started flying by parishioners and leaders and their wives said mean things. The honeymoon was clearly over. In the blink of an eye, before I even knew what hit me, my pastorate was over. God told me to dust my feet off and move on. There was part of me that didn't want to leave. But, God's voice was clear – it was time to move forward.

To this day, nothing I've ever experienced has been more gut wrenching than my very first pastorate. Soperton chewed me up and spit me out like a piece of old gum. I pulled out of Soperton in April of 1999 so wounded, so disappointed, so angry, and so cynical that I came within an inch of leaving ministry all together. In my wildest of dreams, I had never imagined that Christians could be so mean and hateful.

### **Making to CONNECTION**

Do you know what my greatest challenge was in Soperton? My greatest challenge wasn't the immorality. Nor was it a bunch of rogue deacons.

My greatest challenge was resisting the natural urge to defend myself. Words cannot begin to describe how I craved to defend my name and actions. But, here's what I knew. Defending myself would have required me to expose the Associate Pastor's immorality. At that time, personal vindication would come only at the price of another man's humiliation, shame, and public scorn.

Trust me! I wanted vindication. I could taste sweet justice. I longed to defend my name, my character, my calling, and my actions – all of which had been spitefully questioned by parishioners and deacons alike. Yet, in the end, I resisted the urge and remained silent.

I wish I could say that I've always resisted such an urge, but I haven't. Many more times, I have quickly come to my defense, argued my case, and passionately vindicated my actions and name. This is one of my greatest flaws.

How about you?

Have you ever quickly come to your own defense? Have you ever passionately defended your actions and words? Have you ever lost your cool when someone questioned your character or motives? Of course you have. We all have. There isn't a single person here this morning that, at some time or another, has not passionately – if not forcefully – defended himself.

Let's be honest, few things are more frustrating than when our words and actions are misinterpreted, misrepresented, or unfairly judged. No one, and I mean no one, likes to have his or her character, words, or actions attacked. In these cases, our natural, fleshly inclination is to defend ourselves. We become like wounded or cornered animals that quickly defend our turf and ourselves.

Why is this? Why are we so prone to defend ourselves?

Honestly? The way others view our character, actions, and words is hugely important to us. Some of us will admit this and others will not. Either way, the perception others have of us cannot be underestimated.

### **Exploring the SCRIPTURE**

The Sermon on the Mount will shatter this way of thinking. Be forewarned, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Beatitude may very well be the most challenging of them all.

If I'm being completely honest with you, as I examine the eight Beatitudes thru the lens of my own life, the one beatitude that brings me the greatest conviction is this one. Of all the Beatitudes, this one presents the greatest challenge to me and is the one I fail most often to keep.

And, my guess is this, as we discover together what this 3<sup>rd</sup> beatitude really looks like in the life of a Christian, you too will be convicted by how rarely we display this character attribute.

In Matthew 5:5, Jesus proclaims...

*"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

One thing is for sure; meekness is not a character quality our culture applauds. Nor is it a character quality that comes naturally to man.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes...

*“The world thinks in terms of strength and power, of ability, self-assurance and aggressiveness. This is the world’s idea of conquest and possession. The more you assert yourself and express yourself, the more you organize and manifest your powers and ability, the more likely you are to succeed and get [ahead].”*

Lloyd-Jones goes on to write...

*“But here comes this astounding statement, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.’ Once more then, we are reminded at the very beginning that the Christian is altogether different from the world. And not only is the world unlike him; it cannot possibly understand him. He is an enigma to the world. If you and I are not, in this primary sense, enigmas to the non-Christians around us, then this tells us a great deal about our profession of the Christian faith.”*

So, what does it mean to be a person of “meekness”?

To understand meekness, we must reconsider what it means to be “poor in spirit.” If you remember, to be “poor in spirit” is to recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy and depravity in the face of God and His holiness. Thus, the first beatitude deals directly with how we view our sinfulness in relationship to God and His holiness.

When we come to grips with our own spiritual bankruptcy and depravity apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ, our spiritual response is to mourn and grieve over our sin – which is the second beatitude that says, “Blessed are those who mourn.”

The first two beatitudes focus on our relationship with God and should create within us a deep sense of humility and reverence.

The third beatitude shifts gears and exposes how we view ourselves in relationship with people. To be clear, meekness flows out of “poverty of spirit” and “mourning.” It is commonly agreed that without being humbled by our spiritual bankruptcy and brokenhearted over our sin, we will never glorify God thru meekness. Poverty of spirit and mourning over sin are prerequisites for a meek attitude.

Put simply, meekness **“is a controlled desire to see another person’s interests advance ahead of your own.”** (D.A. Carson)

Meekness, or lack thereof, is almost always revealed in the crucible of relationships and persecution.

In regards to relationships, how do we respond when our rights are neglected? How do we respond when our privileges are taken away? How do we respond when we don't get what we believe we deserve or need – from an employer, spouse, child, or friend?

How about persecution? How do we respond when we are attacked? How do we respond when our character is slandered? How do we respond when our words are misrepresented? How do we respond when we are falsely accused? How do we respond when we are mistreated and wounded by another person's actions?

This is the crucible where Christian meekness either shines or is glaringly absent.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines meekness this way...

*“The meek man does not demand anything for himself. He does not take all his rights as claims. He does not make demands for his position, his privileges, his possessions, or his status in life. The man who is meek is not sensitive about himself; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say. To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending. So we are not on the defensive; all that is gone.”*

And then, Lloyd-Jones makes a profound admission...

*“Is it not one of the greatest curses in life as the result of the fall – this sensitivity about self?”*

The fall has cursed us all and left us with many embarrassing and debilitating flaws. Few are more embarrassing and humbling than our natural proclivity to quickly stand to attention and defend ourselves – sometimes at the expense of slaying another person with our words. If we dig a little deeper, what we really find is an inflated perception of ourselves. We will find ego, pride, and self-love. That's right. The catalyst behind our tendency to quickly defend ourselves is pride and narcissism.

Not a single person is void of this curse. We all have pride. We all have ego. We all wrestle with self-love. We all cherish our reputation, our character, and the respect of our name. And, when these things come under question or attack, it is not uncommon for most of us to quickly morph into a defense attorney.

But Jesus has something very different to say. Jesus says, “Favored and approved by God is the man and woman who is meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

John MacArthur puts it this way...

*“The meek person has died to self, and he therefore does not worry about injury to himself, or about loss, insult, or abuse.”*

## Biblical Examples

Let me show what Christian meekness looks like. The Scripture is laced with examples of the meekness Jesus describes in the third beatitude.

### *Abraham & Lot*

First, consider Abraham. After God chose Abraham and made his covenant with him, a dispute broke out between the servants of Abraham and the servants of Lot – Abraham’s nephew. The dispute was over grazing rights in the land of Canaan, which had been promised and given to Abraham.

If you know the story, you know that Lot was simply riding the coattail of Abraham. Abraham was the Father of God’s chosen people. Abraham was Lot’s uncle and elder. Lot was a leach.

So, when the dispute reached its boiling point, we see Abraham do something extraordinary. We see Abraham display godly meekness. Listen to how Abraham responded to Lot...

*“Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go left.”* (Genesis 13:8-9)

What did Abraham do? He didn’t cling to his rights. God had given Abraham the land of Canaan, not Lot. It would have been easy for Abraham to exercise his rights and first choose the parcel of land that he wanted. But, he didn’t. Abraham didn’t defend himself. Nor did Abraham demand his rights. Rather, Abraham displayed meekness by giving the first choice to Lot.

What would you and I have done? Many of us, including myself, would have succumbed to the temptation to exercise our right as God’s chosen leader as choose first, leaving Lot with our leftovers. Not Abraham. He was meek.

### *Moses & Miriam*

Second, let’s look at Moses – arguably the greatest and most courageous leader Israel has ever known.

In Numbers 12, we find a very interesting story that involves injustice toward Moses. As the story goes, Miriam and Aaron were speaking against Moses, God’s chosen leader, because he had married a Cushite woman. Miriam was the instigator. And not only

that, she had a prejudice problem. She didn't like the ethnicity of Moses' wife, so she began questioning Moses' rights and decision-making as the chosen leader of God's people.

Listen carefully to how Moses is described by God in this chapter.

*"Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the people who were on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3)*

To say that God was not happy with Miriam and Aaron was an understatement. God called the three of them to the tent of meeting, where He appeared in a pillar of fire. After God vindicated Moses and departed the scene, Moses turned to find that God had punished Miriam by inflicting her with leprosy.

Do you know how Moses responded? The Bible says that...

*"Moses cried out to the Lord, 'O God, please heal her – please.'" (vs.13)*

Moses didn't revel in God's discipline of Miriam. On the contrary, Miriam's leprosy broke Moses' heart and led him to pray for her healing. Moses wasn't interested in his vindication. No, Moses was interested in reconciliation. That's meekness.

What would you and I have done? Would we have reveled in God's justice toward Miriam? Many of us, if we're being honest, would have looked at Miriam and thought to ourselves – *"She had it coming. She got exactly what she deserved."* Not Moses. He was meek.

### *Joseph & His Brothers*

One of the greatest stories of God's sovereignty is the story of Joseph. Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob. Over the early years of Joseph's life, Jacob's favoritism created a deep root of jealousy and envy among Joseph's brothers. So, one day, his brothers devised a deceitful plan to get rid of Joseph. The end result was that Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery where he suffered unfairly for thirteen years in a dungy prison cell. Years later, after God raised Joseph up to a place of prominent leadership in Egypt (second only to Pharaoh), a famine struck the land.

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt seeking grain for their starving families, Joseph was presented with the perfect opportunity to seek vengeance. Instead, Joseph extended his brothers grace and mercy.

Listen to what Joseph said to his brothers...

*“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”*  
(Genesis 50:19-21)

If ever someone had a right to enact vengeance, it would have been Joseph. Instead, he displayed godly meekness.

What would you and I have done? Can you imagine being sold into slavery and suffering unfairly for thirteen years in prison – all because of your brothers jealousy? Some of us would have used our position of authority to enact vengeance and retribution. Not Joseph. He was meek.

### *Jesus Christ*

And then, there’s Jesus Christ our Savior.

No one has ever experienced the degree of rejection, abandonment, hatred, slander, and persecution that Jesus Christ did. His family thought he was crazy. His disciples abandoned Him in His greatest time of need. His own people, the Jews, rejected Him, slandered Him, and demanded He be put to death on a Roman cross.

How easy would it have been for Jesus to claim His rights as the King of kings and the Lord of lords?

Yet, throughout His earthly ministry, and in the face of intense questioning by the High Priest Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus refused to defend Himself. Even as He hung cursed on a tree for the sins of God’s elect, Jesus resisted the temptation to cling to His right as the omnipotent Creator - a right that could have summoned heavenly angels to rescue Him.

Yes, Jesus boldly defended His Father’s kingdom. Yes, Jesus violently purged the temple when it was defiled by moneychangers. Yes, Jesus offered scathing rebukes of the Pharisees and their false religion.

But, Jesus never defended Himself. Jesus always defended God, God’s Kingdom, and God’s Word. Yet, Jesus never clung to His rights. He never demanded His privileges as the Lord of hosts. Jesus refused to use either natural or supernatural power for His own welfare.

That's meekness on perfect display.

## **Closing Comments**

Listen carefully!

If we have any hope of displaying Christian meekness, we must claim Paul's charge to us in Philippians 2:1-11. Let's read together this great Christological passage.

If we are to be meek...

- ⇒ We must count others more significant than ourselves.
- ⇒ We must look first to the interests of others.
- ⇒ We must diligently refuse to cling to whatever rights we believe we have.
- ⇒ We must take on servanthood.
- ⇒ We must humble ourselves and die to our flesh.
- ⇒ We must do all these things for the glory of Christ and God the Father.

Meekness should not be misunderstood as weakness. On the contrary, as the Bible shows us, meekness is power surrendered to the control of God thru the Holy Spirit. Meekness is deriving our significance and value in Christ, not what others say or do or think. And, when we do that, our words and actions will be gentle, selfless, and humble – not defensive, polemical, and self-centered.

Have you been hurt by another person's actions or words? Are your needs going unmet by a spouse? Is an employer overlooking your rights? Have your motives been unfairly questioned or attacked? Have your words been misunderstood and twisted to mean something untrue? Has your character or reputation been unfairly smeared?

If you can answer "yes" to any of these questions, then here's the truth – you are being tempted to defend yourself. Resist!

Instead, look to the Cross and see your Savior hanging cursed on a tree for your sins. Jesus didn't defend Himself. Jesus didn't cling to His rights.

Jesus responded with meekness. Jesus responded with humility. Jesus responded with prayer and servanthood. Jesus responded by willingly and joyfully giving up His rights so that the elect could be saved for the glory of God.

When we're tempted to act out in self-righteousness instead of meekness, we should all quickly fix our gaze on the Cross of Christ. For hanging on the cross is Meekness! Instead of vindicating Himself, Jesus surrendered His life to the Father's will. By being

lowly and meek, Jesus Christ became the Redeemer of humanity. By being lowly and meek, Jesus brought ultimate glory to God the Father.

**Meekness comes when our eyes are fixed not on our rights, but on our Redeemer.**

Let us all set our gaze on Christ and follow His example of humility and meekness in our relationships and in the face of unfair and unwanted persecution.